

# PWIAS Director Philippe Tortell announces his resignation



November 20, 2018

UBC Peter Wall Institute

Read Dr. Philippe Tortell's letter to Peter Wall Institute faculty associates [here](#).

The attached audio file was recorded during the public announcement of Dr. Philippe Tortell's resignation on November 20, 2018.

<https://pwias.ubc.ca/announcements/pwias-director-philippe-tortell-announces-his-resignation>

## Statement on behalf of Santa Ono, Chair of PWIAS Board of Trustees

Nov. 21, 2018

<https://pwias.ubc.ca/announcements/statement-behalf-santa-ono-chair-pwias-board-trustees>

The Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies is an exceptional part of the university thanks to the work of its many affiliated researchers and directors over the years, including Philippe Tortell.

Dr. Tortell's decision to resign as director was unexpected and is disappointing. However, I appreciate Dr. Tortell's commitment to the Wall Institute over the past two years, and I wish him well in his future endeavors.

Today, I met with PWIAS Distinguished Professors Brett Finlay and Derek Gregory and many others. In the coming days, I will meet with the Board of the Institute to share what I have heard and discuss the path forward. We will be listening closely to the views of our stakeholders as we pursue next steps.

I would like to reiterate that as a public academic institution, UBC places paramount value on academic freedom, and on supporting interdisciplinary research. We are committed to maintaining the Wall Institute's unique role and mission at UBC and to ensuring that the Institute continues to support and nurture the outstanding research for which it is known.

## Statement on behalf of Brett Finlay and Derek Gregory, Peter Wall Distinguished Professors



November 22, 2018

<https://pwias.ubc.ca/announcements/statement-behalf-brett-finlay-and-derek-gregory-peter-wall-distinguished-professors>

We are both deeply saddened by the resignation of Professor Philippe Tortell as Director of the Peter Wall Institute. We respect his reasons for doing so – he has been a principled, passionate and creative Director, so we know how difficult that decision was – and we thank him for his extraordinary work on behalf of the Institute and all who work here and with us across the campus and around the world.

Professor Ono has noted that we met with him to discuss the situation on 21 November, and we are grateful for him making the time to do so at short notice. We believe it will be helpful for us to summarise some of the key points we made to the President at that meeting:

(1) The Institute’s research model is a profoundly *social* one, in which the juxtaposition of scholars working with different ideas and on different issues, and through their regular, informal social interactions, generates a culture of trust in which risk-taking is encouraged, research horizons are broadened and real advances made. Hence the Wall Scholars program, whose members are drawn each year from across the entire campus (from the medical sciences to the performing arts, from the humanities to engineering) is the core and heart of the Institute’s work.

(2) Unlike the Princeton Institute of Advanced Studies, which is not part of Princeton University and which defines its interests in strikingly narrow (‘focused’) terms, the Peter Wall Institute of Advanced Studies is part of UBC and needs to be responsive to the university community as a whole. Hence the essential heterogeneity of the Wall Scholars program.

(3) We are committed to the vision of the Institute as a place where creative scholars of the first rank can forge their own collaborations and freely pursue innovative ideas beyond the confines of centrally determined directives and priorities. Since none of us has privileged insight into what will matter most, and serendipity cannot be imposed, we believe that every University needs a place where scholars are encouraged to think outside the box (and the cluster), where their social interactions foster a fascination with the unexpected and the unexplored, and where the independence of their work is respected and nurtured. The Peter Wall Institute is such a place. There is of course room for clusters but to limit the work of the Institute this way is as exclusionary as it is destructive.

(4) The Director’s Strategic Plan was arrived at through an extensive consultation – not least with our Faculty Associates, who know the work of the Institute best. We were deeply concerned at our exclusion from Board discussions about the future of the Institute. We explicitly asked to attend the relevant meetings – we normally attend all Board of Trustees meetings as observers – but were told they were in camera.

(5) We ask that a reconstituted Board of Trustees reconsider the Strategic Plan for the Institute in the light of our concerns.

*Brett Finlay and Derek Gregory*  
*Peter Wall Distinguished Professors*

